

## Improving Corrections

As part of its mission to make prisons safer, NIJ sponsors research, development, and evaluation initiatives designed to anticipate and preempt, as well as mitigate, problems faced by corrections officers and administrators. Three of these initiatives are described here.

### Keeping correctional officers safe

NIJ supports the development of performance standards for traditional law enforcement and corrections equipment, such as handcuffs, body armor, and metal detectors. One example of NIJ's work in this area was an assessment of personal alarm systems for correctional officers to use in an emergency. The study was conducted as a joint venture with the U.S. Department of Defense—specifically, the Information Technology Center of the U.S. Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR).

Personal alarm systems rapidly distribute an alert from one correctional officer to another or to the facility's central command. Vendors are working on new systems using emerging technologies such as global positioning systems, biometrics, ultra wideband transmissions, and implanted microchips. SPAWAR produced a comprehensive guide to officer duress systems to help administrators identify their needs, select the appropriate system, and deploy it effectively. The guide also provides a scheme for classifying officer duress systems, a simplified duress system model, basic issues to consider during the selection process, a preview of current and emerging technologies, and an overview of products currently available.

### For more information

- *Duress Systems in Corrections Facilities, In Short—Toward Criminal Justice Solutions*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, September 2004 (NCJ 205836), is available at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/205836.pdf>. A highly detailed guide is the *Correctional Officer Duress Systems: Selection Guide*, Charleston, SC: SPAWAR Systems Charleston, October 2003 (NCJ 202947), available at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/202947.pdf>.

### Understanding and reducing sexual assault in prisons

Sexual assault among prisoners is not well understood. The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 calls for: (1) establishing national standards to detect and prevent sexual violence in prisons; (2) increasing the availability of data and related information in order to improve the management and administration of correctional facilities; and (3) increasing accountability for prisoner protection.

NIJ's immediate research agenda is to build knowledge about the incidence and prevalence of prison sexual violence, the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, and the impact of sexual victimization in prison, including prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases among prison populations.

NIJ is currently leading a national qualitative study of sexual violence and prison culture that will be completed in late 2005. In 2004, NIJ made several awards related to prison sexual violence. Two studies are focusing on the development of risk assessment instruments to assist corrections practitioners in identifying likely victims and offenders. Two other NIJ grantees are conducting surveys to identify and characterize existing programs or practices designed to prevent sexual assault in adult and juvenile correctional facilities. The studies are mainly for information gathering, but researchers will make some preliminary assessments concerning promising programs or practices.

NIJ plans to award grants in 2005 for research on the impact of sexual violence on corrections and on the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases.

#### For more information

- *Data Collections for the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 30, 2004 (NCJ 206109), available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/dcprea03.pdf>.

**A testimonial**

*Officers Chris Athen, Mike Bashor, Jeremy Branham, and Kevin Johnson of the Nevada Department of Corrections Special Response Team participated in two scenarios at last year's event. Last year the team drove all the way to Moundsville, but this year, most were able to fly.*

*"We got a grant to buy our plane tickets and raised money to pay for the rest of the trip," Branham said, adding that the team washed cars—and even dogs—to raise the money. "If it was dirty, we washed it," he said. Meanwhile, two team members drove their equipment more than 40 hours to be a part of the program. Johnson said the team was so impressed with the event last year that they knew they had to return.*

**Mock Prison Riot™**

Every year NIJ's Office of Science and Technology's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) and the Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization (OLETC) sponsor a 4-day Mock Prison Riot™ at a former penitentiary in Moundsville, West Virginia. Police cadets and students play the role of prisoners staging an uprising so that law enforcement and corrections officers can train in realistic scenarios and test new less-lethal tools for controlling unruly crowds.

The event also allows administrators to consider the vulnerability of their facilities and assess such equipment as communication systems and drug detection devices. Vendors showcase their newest technology advances. Medical, fire, and emergency response personnel play support roles treating and evacuating staged injuries. Also present are many observers from Federal, State, and international corrections and law enforcement agencies; public and private organizations; and the media.

The Mock Prison Riot™ is in its seventh year, and its popularity continues to grow. The first year had 70 attendees. In May 2004, more than 1,300 persons attended from 41 States, Canada, Germany, Israel, and the United Kingdom. Riot scenarios included hostage situations, a hazardous materials spill, cell extractions, large-scale disturbances in the prison yard, possession of home-made weapons, and escape attempts.

**For more information**

- OLETC maintains a Mock Prison Riot™ Web site at <http://www.oletc.org/riot>; or contact the Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization, 2001 Main Street, Wheeling, WV 26003; 888-306-5382 (toll-free).